



Written by on June 24, 2009

Iran's Supreme Leader Defies Pressure

"I had insisted and will insist on implementing the law on the election issue. Neither the establishment nor the nation will yield to pressure at any cost," the British *Guardian* newspaper quoted Khamenei.

Just the day before the announcement, however, Khamenei ordered Iran's Guardian Council — the 12 clerics that have Supreme Court-like power to oversee elections in the Islamic Republic — to take an additional five days to assess the election results.

Observers have interpreted this move as an attempt by the regime to buy more time to form a political response to the crisis.



The strength of the government has been felt by the opposition. Voice of America's VOA News reported on June 24 that an aide close to the leading opposition candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, said that police raided the offices of a newspaper owned by Mousavi and arrested 25 members of the staff. The aide told Western media organizations that the raid on the *Kalemeh Sabz* or "Green Word" offices took place on June 22.

The opposition continues to make its voice known, though organized street protests were practically nonexistent on June 23-24. Candidate Mousavi's wife, Zahra Rahnavard, said in a statement posted on her husband's website: "I regret the arrest of many politicians and people and want their immediate release. It is my duty to continue legal protests to preserve Iranian rights." She also noted: "Based on the constitution, gatherings and protests are accepted rights."

A voice of opposition also came from Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, whom the *Guardian* identifies as one of Iran's most senior clerics. Montazeri issued a call on his website for three days of national mourning for those killed, starting on June 24. "Resisting the people's demand is religiously prohibited," noted Montazeri.

Montazeri was once considered to be the logical heir to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, but a series of controversial events cause him to fall from favor with the founder of the Islamic Republic. One of these events was his association with Mehdi Hashemi, who ran an organization out of Montazeri's office. Hashemi was thought to have embarrassed then-speaker of Iran's parliament, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, by leaking information about Rafsanjani's connection with the Iran-Contra affair and his meeting with the American architect of that operation, Council on Foreign Relations member Robert McFarlane. Hashemi was arrested, convicted, and executed in 1987 on charges of counterrevolutionary activities, and Montazeri's fortunes also began falling after that.

It is interesting that Rafsanjani — along with Montazeri — is now considered to be a leading opposition figure in Iran, and an ally of Mousavi.

The *Guardian* also reported that reformist cleric Mehdi Karoubi, who finished last in the election, called on Iranians to hold ceremonies on June 25 to mourn the dead protesters. Karoubi, in an open letter to



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Ezzatollah Zarghami, head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, also compared the current Iranian government to Afghanistan's Taliban: "You know well that those who support Ahmadinejad are those who promote a backward, Taliban version of Islam, something that is against the views of [the late Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini."

Iran's state-run Iranian Students News Agency reported on June 24 that the nation's Interior Minister Sadegh Mahsouli charged that demonstrators involved in the unrest were financed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, an opposition group. Iranian leaders have repeatedly accused the United States, Britain, and Israel of fomenting the protests, although President Obama has denied that the United States and its allies are interfering in Iran's internal affairs.

The United States has not had diplomatic relations with Iran since 1980, and now relations between Iran and Britain have suffered a setback as each country expelled two of the other's diplomats during the week. Britain's *Times* newspaper reported that on the morning of June 24, Manouchehr Mottaki, the Iranian foreign minister, said that Tehran was considering whether to downgrade diplomatic ties with Britain.

The *Times* also quoted a spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who said: "Iran's decision to try to turn what are clearly internal matters for Iran into a conflict with the UK and others is deeply regrettable and without foundation."

Iran's semi-official Fars news agency quoted Intelligence Minister Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ezhei's accusation against Britain on June 24: "England is among the countries that fan the flames with their heavy propaganda, which is against all diplomatic norms. And the BBC Farsi has also played a major role. Also, a number of people carrying British passports have played a role in the recent disturbances."

An interesting op-ed piece posted on the website of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations on June 22 was entitled "Leave Iran to the Iranians." Our interest in it is only enhanced because its author, Leslie H. Gelb, is president emeritus and a board senior fellow of the CFR. Gelb's lead-off paragraph provides President Obama with a lesson in diplomatic restraint that seems to come right from the playbook of so-called isolationists like Texas representative Ron Paul, who has long beaten a drum warning about the consequences of "blowback" in the Middle East. Consider what Gelb has to say:

Iranian hardliners just can't wait for President Barack Obama to raise high the protesters' green banner so they can turn it red, white, and blue and unleash a bloodbath against "American agents." And American hardliners and foreign-policy gurus just keep pushing Obama toward precisely that rhetorical abyss, hoping either to topple the mullah dictatorship — which they know to be a very long shot — or to ensure what they see as the benefits of an American-Iranian confrontation.

In his essay, Gelb praised Obama for "mostly acting with considerable skill and sensitivity in this ultra dangerous situation."

In a statement delivered to the House of Representative on June 19 opposing a resolution condemning the Iranian government, Rep. Paul summed up his reasons as follows: "I adhere to the foreign policy of our Founders, who advised that we not interfere in the internal affairs of countries overseas. I believe that is the best policy for the United States, for our national security and for our prosperity. I urge my colleagues to reject this and all similar meddling resolutions."

Rep. Paul's assessment of Obama's actions in this crisis are also similar to Gelb's: "I have admired President Obama's cautious approach to the situation in Iran and I would have preferred that we in the



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House had acted similarly."

One rarely sees an internationalist policy organization like the CFR and a constitutionalist foreign policy advocate like Ron Paul come to similar conclusions. But in this case, both conclusions are correct.

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